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My Note Book.

Leonato.—Are these things spoken, or do I but dream?

Don John.—Sir, they are spoken, and these things are true.

—*Much Ado About Nothing.*



AN Italian gentleman of taste, who married an American and took her back to Florence, where he has a house full of objects of art, delights to tell his visitors how he picked up most of his treasures in New York, which he declares to be the best hunting-ground in the world for the bric-à-brac collector. It is, doubtless, true that the intelligent prowler at bric-à-brac shops and auction rooms here has the chance to secure many a bargain; and, to a more limited extent, I suppose the same must be the case in other American cities. In this land of sudden fortunes and sudden reverses, the home is more unstable than in any other country on the globe, and the whirligig of time may reasonably be counted on to bring into the open market, sooner or later, pretty nearly every valuable or curious object of art that is owned by a private person. This applies not only to the mansion which holds a well-known collection, every item of which will be carefully scrutinized by the eagle eye of the press and of the trade, but also to the modest little home which, in breaking up, parts with its "lares and penates," which not infrequently include some rare old book, picture or object of pottery or bric-à-brac the value of which, likely enough, is unknown not only to the owner, but even to the dealer who is called in to make an appraisal, or to the philistine auctioneer who hoists his red flag outside the house. The ignorance of some of the leading bric-à-brac dealers in New York is amazing. In no other country would one have the assurance to attempt to conduct a business about which one knew so little. All that saves him from ruin and disgrace is that his customers know so much less than he does—at least, this combined with the fact that when the average American buyer finds that he has parted with his money through misrepresentation, he foolishly keeps silent and swallows his loss, instead of making the dealer reimburse him. It will be thought by some, no doubt, that the dealer has simply swindled his customer. But I incline to think this is not so. He is rather ignorant than dishonest. It is not difficult to prove such to be the case, and one of these days I may transcribe for My Note Book some of the curious stories of the blunders of dealers that have come to my knowledge from time to time.

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As for the blunders of auctioneers and the catalogue makers of auction sales—they would make an unending serial; but it would be too monotonous to be interesting. Think of going through that marvellous catalogue of Mr. Graham's "Watson sale" last winter, and enumerating all its errors! On that occasion the intelligent prowler had plenty of chances to get bargains, and he got them, sure enough; as when, for instance, old Chinese porcelains were offered as modern Japanese ware, and exquisite old embroideries from church and convent, absurdly catalogued, were knocked down for the price of crewel work on Canton flannel. Another chance was when a consignment of Chinese and Japanese art objects arrived here from Baltimore for sale *without an invoice*, and some clerk in the auction room undertook to make one. The intelligent prowler that time had excellent pickings. There is also the case of the honest auctioneer who, being in doubt as to the character of some fine rock crystal and agate snuff-bottles he was selling, remarked that he would not guarantee them, whereupon the lots were promptly slaughtered, and the intelligent prowler, who in this case was that wide-awake dealer, Mr. R. E. Moore, quickly gathered them in, and I am told that he subsequently cleared several hundred per cent profit on some of these same snuff-bottles.

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As an offset to this, we have the case of the less scrupulous auctioneer, who takes the dual rôle of seller and bidder, and for the nonce himself becomes the intelligent prowler. This occurred about six months ago. The auctioneer, discovering that a lot of solid silverware he was given to sell had been catalogued by mistake as plated ware, set to work to buy it for himself. He sent out the things to be weighed, so that he knew just

what they were worth as old silver. When they were reached in the course of the sale, his man in the audience made a modest bid for them, not far below their value as plated ware. It happened, though, that there was another intelligent prowler who had discovered the mistake in the catalogue, and he bid so vigorously for the silver that the auctioneer's man was fairly knocked out of time, and gave up the game in disgust.

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If the auction-room frequenters could only manage to know in advance as much as the dealers do about the degree of good faith that may reasonably be looked for at the various sales, they could find many bargains. At the recent auction, for instance, "under the direction of Mr. James Graham," at the old rooms of Ortgies, in Broadway, among a lot of stuff put in by Graham himself and other dealers, and which was fully protected, was about \$15,000 worth of the interminable Stevens bric-à-brac, which the latter had hypothecated in Philadelphia. Graham had advanced \$3500 on it, and he let it go for what it would bring, which perhaps was \$1500 in excess of that sum. Lanthier got the best of the goods, including the old snuff-boxes, watches and miniatures, most of which he sold immediately to Mr. Morosini, a partner of Mr. Jay Gould; and the quite remarkable box of Limoges enamel, for which he paid \$530, at Christie's in London would bring more than that number of guineas.

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Now that the notorious Mr. Gillig and the American Exchange have gone into liquidation, there will, doubtless, before long be a *genuine* sale of the Stevens goods, when, if the dealers give them a chance, frequenters of the auction room will have a fine opportunity to get bargains; for *this* time the things will have to be sold "without reserve." Three times already have the same goods been sold at various auction rooms, and each time "absolutely without reserve." The last time the dealers knew better than to touch them. But the public was not so wise. Mr. Seward Webb, for instance, evidently did not know that it was Gillig, the virtual owner of the goods, who, sitting on a front seat, "raised" him on nearly everything that he bid on.

* * *

THE dangerous Trouillebert, whose picture in the Dumas collection, it will be remembered, passed for years as a fine Corot, is still in the field. So let American buyers beware. The *Moniteur des Arts*, writing recently of the Nice Exhibition, incidentally remarked of his "Les laveuses au bord du Clain" that they "sing-trop Corot"—"ape Corot too much."

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A SUPERB group, in slatish green marble, by Barye, of a tiger surprising a fawn, two thirds of the size of life, has been acquired by Mr. Cyrus J. Lawrence. It is a characteristic work, in the sculptor's broadest and most vigorous style, and perhaps is unique in being executed in this material. The tiger, firmly planted, with distended haunches, has seized the fawn by the throat, the head of the poor beast being thrown back in a spasm of agony. Mr. Lawrence's collection includes fifty-three bronzes, all but one of which—a Barbedienne reproduction—if I remember aright, being original pieces, several—like that marvellous little group of a jaguar devouring a crocodile—being artist's proofs. There is to be an exhibition of Barye's works in Paris next spring, in aid of a fund to erect a monument to his memory, and Mr. Lawrence suggests that there be at the same time a similar exhibition in New York for the same purpose. It is a good idea, and if Mr. Walters, of Baltimore, can be induced to contribute from his unsurpassed collection—which includes three of the four groups made for the Duc d'Orleans, and other unique pieces—we might have such a representative exhibition as would hardly suffer by comparison even with that to be held in Barye's own land. In New York alone, Mr. Lawrence's fifty-three bronzes could be augmented, from various sources, by about thirty pieces, and there could be brought together from New York collections about twenty-five water-colors by Barye, half a dozen canvases in oils, and various drawings.

* * *

By the way, I hear that several little bronzes by Barye at the Corcoran gallery have been stolen, no one knows exactly when. It would be easy to drop into one's overcoat-pocket several of the smaller objects without being observed. At the Havemeyer sale at the American Art

Galleries, last March, I marked on the catalogue a little bronze group, by Jacquemart, of a "hound and turtle," meaning to buy it if it went at my price. When the number was reached by the auctioneer it was not called. Asking the reason, afterwards, I learned that the piece had been stolen. I am told that there is scarcely a sale of importance but some such theft as this occurs, and it is invariably made with such discretion as to leave no doubt as to the æsthetic character of the thief. During the exhibition at Ortgies', in 1881, of the Raymond collection, a show-case was opened and a very fine Japanese silver vase, worth \$800, and an exquisite gold-lacquered inro, worth \$250, were abstracted. A reward was offered for their recovery, and they were brought back by a "friend" of the thief, who explained that the latter was a kleptomaniac. On another occasion, at the same auction rooms, a gold sword guard was taken out of a show-case from among a number of others—this was *not* recovered. An odd theft happened at Ortgies' old rooms during a sale of Japanese goods for Mr. Yayi, when a very beautiful silver incense-burner was stolen; the curious feature being that, in order to get at the object, it had been necessary for the thief to reach across a high table, and near by a woman's garter with a silver clasp was found. On the clasp was a monogram. It was hoped that this might lead to the identification of the thief, and the garter was taken to Tiffany's with that view; but it turned out that garter and clasp were of English make, and no clew was ever found to their owner.

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THE reference, last month, in My Note-Book, to the shameful incident that when the library of a learned clergyman, deceased, was offered at auction his family found a number of erotic books catalogued as part of his collection has unaccountably been construed by young Mr. Beecher, of Brooklyn—and others, I am told—to apply to the recent sale of the personal effects of the distinguished Congregational preacher of that city. Nothing could be further from the fact. The incident in question occurred long before the Beecher sale, at which latter it is well known that no books of the objectionable class mentioned *were* catalogued. I believe that there has not been a more honorably-conducted auction in this city than that of the Beecher collection.

* * *

A CURIOUS lawsuit is threatened. At the A. T. Stewart sale a well-known dealer bought for a Southern client Fortuny's famous "Serpent Charmer" for \$13,100. He hung it temporarily in one of his salesrooms, where it caught the attention of a Brooklyn collector, who, expressing unbounded admiration for it, asked the price. The junior partner of the firm was in at the time, and, somewhat in the spirit of a bluff, promptly answered, "\$18,000." "I will buy it," responded the visitor. The young dealer was fairly taken aback; but the visitor evidently meant business, and went away saying that he would send his check for the picture. On the return of the senior partner the incident was related, and no time was lost in communicating with the Southern client and offering him a handsome profit on his bargain. But the Southern client is a true connoisseur, who cares a good deal more for the possession of a coveted picture than he does for making a profit on a purchase, so he replied that he did not buy the picture to sell but to keep, and ordered it sent on to him without delay. It duly arrived, and "The Serpent Charmer" now occupies a place of honor upon his walls. In the mean while, the Brooklyn collector returned and tendered his check, which was refused on the ground that the picture had been sold to him by mistake. "Mistake or no mistake, I will have that picture," he replied, and he has put the matter into the hands of his lawyers.

* * *

It is curious to note the diverse workings of what the newspapers call "the art movement" in different parts of the country. While in such Western communities as those of Chicago and Milwaukee—where, if one is to believe Eastern critics, no art knowledge or art interest is to be looked for—the greatest activity prevails and the people are hungry for art information and instruction, in venerable cities like Philadelphia and Baltimore—which might reasonably be expected to become very centres of æsthetic culture—there would seem to be little demand for picture exhibits or for increased facilities for art education. While in some cases the public demand is clearly ahead of the artistic resources of the community, in others the enterprise of the artists

would seem to be in advance of the popular interest they would seek to arouse. In Philadelphia the latter is plainly the case. The enterprising Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, with its admirably managed schools and its many interesting exhibitions, would be appreciated in some vigorous young Western city; but in Philadelphia the energies of the directors are all but wasted. In January, through the enterprise of certain public-spirited young men of the Academy, headed by Mr. Charles Henry Hart, a most admirable exhibition of national portraits was held—the first in the history of the country, I believe—and it fell perfectly flat in the community. Now one might naturally have anticipated that if nothing else could move the drowsy Philadelphian to an interest in art, an exhibition of his blue-blooded ancestors would do it. But not so. The Biddles and the Cadwalladers, and others of hardly less distinguished lineage, as a matter of course sent portraits of their grandfathers and their grandmothers, of their uncles and their sisters and their aunts. "Noblesse oblige;" and any collection of Philadelphians without the regulation infusion of Biddles and Cadwalladers was simply an impossibility. But having contributed to the exhibition the counterfeit presentments of their noble ancestors, the Biddles and the Cadwalladers and their society satellites, great and small, pretty generally remained away. Can the reader be so ignorant as to ask why? Can he be so ignorant as not to know that the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts is situated north of Market Street, and that Philadelphia has never been known to give its approval to enterprises of any sort that do not take place south of that social equator? How the departed Biddles and Cadwalladers had the patience to remain for a whole month in their picture frames in such an unaristocratic portion of the city will always be a wonder. But stay they did, in their all but solitary confinement, until the day of release came at last, and they were returned to the care of their anxious descendants south of Market Street.

* * *

AN interesting series illustrating Monticelli's early and more conventional style—before he began to dispense with the aid of brushes in painting his pictures—is to be seen at the show-rooms of Mr. H. O. Watson, in West Thirtieth Street. It consists of several sumptuously colored decorative panels of cherubs with garlands and stately dames in rich robes of the period of the Second Empire. Monticelli was a favorite of Eugénie, and she humored the mad painter in many of his whims. It must have been one of these whims to have his own portrait introduced with that of the Empress, as it appears on one of these panels, he standing by her, with his arm placed familiarly upon her shoulder.

* * *

IT is gratifying to learn that Augustus St. Gaudens, to whose artistic skill New York is indebted for the admirable statue of Farragut in Madison Square, has been commissioned to execute the proposed monument to Peter Cooper, who, it is pleasant to remember, was the young sculptor's early friend and patron. The monument is to be a bronze statue, heroic size, with a granite pedestal; the philanthropist will be shown seated. More than this has not been determined. Mr. St. Gaudens is to receive \$25,000 for his work, which sum is already in the hands of the committee. The pedestal may cost an additional \$10,000. The site has not yet been chosen. Some of the monument committee favor the open space north of Cooper Institute; others, the little enclosure just south of it. The proposition to cut through Lafayette Place to Fourth Avenue has suggested a favorable site at their junction. Other members of the committee would like to have it in Central Park or in one of the up-town squares. It is urged by these gentlemen that Cooper Institute is monument enough in itself, without the addition of a statue. In answer it might be said that the memory of Peter Cooper will never need a monument of any kind in New York; but, as it has been decided to erect one, it would seem reasonable to follow precedent by placing the statue as near as possible to the great life-work of that good man.

* * *

MESSRS. BOUSSOD, VALADON & CO. write to inform me that Mr. Benjamin Constant will come to this country in October, under their auspices, and that while here he will paint a few portraits—"not to exceed six." They do me the honor to invite me to be one of the most fortunate half dozen. I must decline. To avail myself of such a privilege, to the exclusion of forty odd millions in the

land who have the same right—and most of them, I doubt not, handsomer faces—I feel would be an act of selfishness with which I cannot afford to burden my soul.

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THE repeal of the legal prohibition of picture auctions after dark has caused an unusually large number of sales during the past few weeks, and consequently the picture market has been glutted, to the pecuniary loss of the principals in several instances. Since the dispersion of the Spencer collection there has not been one really successful sale. In that case, the reputation of the owner as a connoisseur, and the indiscriminate praises of some of the newspapers, carried several of the inferior canvases to absurdly high figures, which I know surprised nobody more than the owner himself. The accidents of the sale—always to be taken into account—were, on the whole, favorable to Mr. Spencer. If he had reason to expect better prices for his examples of Rousseau, Millet, Delacroix and the Decamps, he did remarkably well with those of Corot, Daubigny and Gérôme, to say nothing of finding a buyer at \$26,000 for Troyon's "Drove of Cattle and Sheep," an excellent painting, to be sure, but a most painful one. Mr. Cornelius Vanderbilt can place it in a gallery where it will hold its own with anything in his fine collection; but who would want to *live* with such a picture, and forever see that brutal drover raining his blows upon the head of the poor cow, or note the mute appeal for mercy in the eyes of the mate of the defenceless beast?

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THE artist Hall's collection of his own work was advertised for sale, by Ortgies, at the Fifth Avenue galleries; but the evening selected chanced to be the one after the famous "blizzard," when the streets were impassable, and the sale was postponed indefinitely. Next came the "collection of the late Mr. Edward F. Rook, with additions from two other private collections." There were really three others—viz., May F. Groversteen, Benjamin Altman and Henry Chauncey. The last named had only two pictures in the sale, Cole's "Mt. Etna" and Hamon's "L'Amour en Visite," and he bought them in at \$400 and \$950 respectively. Except Thomas Moran's "Cloud and Sunshine," bought in for \$410, and the three canvases of F. A. Bridgman, the published promise that the sale would be "without reserve" was fulfilled. The buyers included Mrs. F. H. Bosworth, Dr. G. H. Wynkoop, and Messrs. David S. Brown, S. A. Coale, of St. Louis, James Irvine, F. W. Jones, Edward Blair, James W. Ellsworth, of Chicago, R. Scott, Clarence Whitman, James McCormick, D. C. Shepard, of Minneapolis, J. Hull Browning (who paid \$1425 for A. F. Bunner's "Venice"), M. Fatman, William Scholle, Edward Brandon, Thomas B. Clarke (who bought "A Wet October Day," by C. M. Dewey, for \$90), Francis Tones, F. W. Jones, William H. Shaw, F. A. Bochman, W. J. Brown, C. N. Howard and Henry N. Palmer, of Brooklyn, F. A. Abell, T. B. Walker, and Herman Fleitmann (who paid \$1150 for "After the Storm," by Achenbach). Most of the pictures were unimportant, but, on the whole, they sold very cheap.

* * *

ONE ought not to be surprised, I suppose, at any trickery at a New York picture auction, after the revelations of dishonesty which are constantly coming to light in relation to that business. Yet I do confess to astonishment at what I have learned about the recent alleged sale of the Kearney-Mott collection, at Chickering Hall. Not that I unduly pinned my faith on Mr. Kearney personally in his connection with the transaction, for the ways of the local politician are not usually such as inspire unlimited confidence. But Mr. Mott is a gentleman of high character, whose name seemed an absolute guarantee of good faith with the public. After, therefore, the sale had been advertised as "without reserve," it was a great surprise to find that most of the important pictures had been "bought in" in the interest of the principals. Mr. Kearney's chums of the defunct Blossom Club were out in force to applaud certain pictures when they were put up, and to bid up others when required to do so. But there were other decoys—"cappers" I think they are called at the Bowery mock auctions—of greater respectability. One was a well-known amateur feather-weight boxer at one of the athletic clubs, another a member of a Boston firm of picture dealers, and a third a New York dealer who "bought in" with great industry whenever a picture was in danger of going too cheap. I am told by friends of Mr. Mott that personally he is not to blame for this disgraceful business—that the whole thing was "man-

aged" by Mr. Kearney, in whom he seems to have put surprising confidence.

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CERTAINLY Mr. Mott knew nothing of the bribery transaction at Albany that preceded the sale. Let me give the story as it is told to me. There seems to be no doubt as to its truth, and I should say that it can be verified to the satisfaction of any investigating committee that might be interested enough to look into it:

* * *

It will be remembered that an amendment to the State law prohibiting picture auction sales after dark was passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor just about in time to affect this Kearney-Mott sale and the preceding Spencer sale, which, in accordance with previous announcements, were both to be held in the evening. It is not generally known, however, that when the bill came up on its third reading it was blocked by the unreasonable objections of a certain Assemblyman of the Blossom Club stamp, who keeps a "groggery" somewhere near the Battery. The promoters of the bill were made to understand that it would cost \$5000 to get it passed, and all attempts to move it were ineffectual. As a compromise, however, the "strikers" finally agreed to take \$2500. The demand was complied with, and the bill became a law. I am assured that this Assemblyman acted on instructions from one in New York personally interested in the situation, and that he duly divided the spoils with that worthy person in consideration of so timely a "tip."

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To return to the Mott-Kearney "sale." Let me mention a few cases of how the principal pictures were protected. Mr. B. C. Williams, Jr., was obliging enough to bid up to \$4900 for the "Venus Disarming Cupid," by Bouguereau (59), and it was ostensibly knocked down to him. A few minutes later Gérôme's "Interior of a Persian Inn" (61) was reached, and Mr. Theodore C. Noe, of Blakeslee & Co., accommodatingly allowed that canvas to be knocked down to him for \$5000, and soon after Gérôme's "Circassian Slave" (133) followed suit at \$4800. There can be little doubt that all of the following pictures were bought in:

42, Corot, "Near Paris;" 58, Schreyer, "The Advance Guard;" 60, Troyon, "Returning from the Fair;" 67 and 68, Maréchal's "Galileo at Velletri" and "Columbus Brought Back from the New World;" 91, Daubigny, "On the Seine;" 95, Moreau, "Fête in the Middle Ages" (illustrated on page 131); 102, Diaz, "Landscape;" 114, Troyon, "Landscape and Sheep;" 117, Perrault, "Moise exposé sur le Nil;" 119, Meyer von Bremen, "In Which Hand?" 122, Rousseau, "Landscape;" 126, Ferrandiz's "Fortun's Studio;" 128, Madou's "Jolly Musicians;" 130, Troyon, "Going to the Fair;" 134, Bouguereau, "Resting;" 135, Schreyer, "A Wallachian Teamster Entangled in the Marshes of the Danube."

The twenty pictures named brought, according to the fictitious figures given out, \$48,825—a pretty slice out of the total sum supposed to have been realized by the sale. Most of these pictures were knocked down to Mr. Lanthier, the dealer, and can still be found at his place; at least they are there at the present writing—about three weeks after the Mott-Kearney "sale."

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THE sale of the pictures of Mr. Henry J. Chapman, Jr., at Chickering Hall, is not finished at the present writing; but it is a pleasure to remark that it appears to be as honorably conducted an auction as has been seen in New York. Mr. Chapman assures me that every painting in the collection is his own, and that I was misinformed as to the assertion that dealers had contributed to it. Several dealers, he says, did offer to do so; but he would not allow anything that did not belong to him to appear in the catalogue. Before the first night of the sale there was undoubtedly a general impression that the pictures would be "protected;" for Mr. Chapman has been known for many years as a trader in pictures, as well as a collector, and it was not supposed that he would take the risks of an unreserved auction. That he did so is greatly to his credit in these days when a clean transaction of the sort seems to be the exception rather than the rule. Unfortunately, the lack of confidence in the sale seriously affected the receipts on the first night; but the best pictures were reserved for later on, and on the second night the eighty-one canvases brought \$52,880 against \$16,415 for about the same number—but much inferior in point of merit—disposed of the previous night. Detailed criticism of the sale, with the names of buyers, must be reserved for next month.

MONTEZUMA.